**Asian Journal of Psychiatry, 2020; 51, e102073: Response to *PubPeer* Comments**

**Comment:** #1 ***Pterostichus californicus*** commented October 2022

See [https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/ppc.12762](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/ppc.12762" \t "_blank) for some concerns which are also related to this paper. Comments from the authors are appreciated.

**Response:** We have already published a response letter addressing every point mentioned. Kindly refer to this letter:

* *Mamun, M.A. and Griffiths, M.D. (2022), Using media reports about suicide as data: Response to Etchells et al. (2021). Perspect Psychiatr Care, 58: 3106-3112. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ppc.12991>*

**Comment:** #2 **Dorothy V.M. Bishop** commented October 2022

This paper, which recycles newspaper reports of suicide, gives the name of the individual who took his life. This does not conform to accepted ethical practice. The paper also describes the methods used, and uses the phrase 'commited suicide', which goes against accepted media guidelines. It is not clear what scientific value there is in such a report, which has potential to cause harm.

**Response:** For the record, it is a Letter to the Editor, not a paper. Most of the comments were already addressed in the response [paper](file:///Users/MohammedMamun/Downloads/.%20https:/doi.org/10.1111/ppc.12991) cited in our first response (<https://doi.org/10.1111/ppc.12991>). Here we again respond to the comment based on the four major points.

1. [Our letter] recycles newspaper reports of suicide

We are not the first to use this method and a number of similar letters and papers have used media reports which have been published in the ***Asian Journal of Psychiatry***. We have already addressed this in the cited response letter as follows:

*“It is worth mentioning that we used a well‐established method of retrieving suicide data from the press media. Much of the criticism of our paper concerns the method we used to collect the data. This is a method that has been widely used by researchers globally as well as in South Asia, particularly among countries with no (or inactive) suicide surveillance system for collecting suicide information. Previous studies using this method include those in Bangladesh (e.g., Arafat et al., 2018, 2020; Arafat & Hossain, 2018; Islam et al., 2021; Shah et al., 2017; Soron & Islam, 2020), India (e.g., Armstrong et al., 2019; Balaji & Patel, 2021; Chahal et al., 2021; Kar et al., 2020; Patel, 2019; Pathare et al., 2020; Shoib et al., 2020; Sripad et al., 2021), Ghana (e.g., Abdulai, 2020; Adinkrah, 2020; Quarshie et al., 2015), Nigeria (e.g., Olibamoyo et al., 2021; Oyetunji et al., 2021), Pakistan (e.g., Khan et al., 2009; Naz, 2016), Sri Lanka (Sørensen et al., 2021), Uganda (Kaggwa et al., 2021), and the United States (Kronenberg, 2021) as well as cross‐ national studies examining suicides from media reports in India, Bangladesh, Saudi Arabia, UK, Germany, and Italy (e.g., Kar et al., 2021; Thakur & Jain, 2020). In sum, there are dozens of papers that have used exactly the same method as us (and none of the aforementioned references involved us as authors or co‐authors), but as far as we are aware, Etchells et al. have not written a commentary on these or any other published paper using this method.”*

1. [Our letter] gives the name of the individual who took his life

This particular suicide case was widely reported in newspapers, television reports, and many discussions and posts on social media in Bangladesh. The name of the person who died by suicide is in the public domain. Being the first suicide case during the initiation of the COVID-19 pandemic in Bangladesh, this suicide got much attention in the media and became the talk of Bangladesh. Given that it was a suicide case heavily discussed in the Bangladeshi media, we do not see there are any ethical concerns in this particular instance. The name of the individual had been published and mentioned dozens of times before our letter. This was not a confidential case study but a case that was widely mentioned in Bangladesh where the name of the individual was widely known. If the journal policy was not to include the name of the person, the peer reviewer(s) could have asked us to remove it after he reviewed it prior to publication and we would have done so. We were not asked to remove the name and as far as we are aware, there was no policy by the ***Asian Journal of Psychiatry*** that names already in the public domain should not be used.

The second comment by Bishop regarding the “ethical practice” of suicide reporting appears to originate from the World Health Organization’s guidelines for journalists about reporting suicide in media. Bishop raised an issue that was meant for media journalists, not academics. We have already responded to this point in detail. Please see our published letter: <https://doi.org/10.1111/ppc.12991>.

We would also like to point out that naming a person who died by suicide is not an unusual practice in the literature. Celebrity suicides are often cited in the literature (on the grounds that their deaths have been widely reported in the media). Being the first suicide case, our case was widely reported in the Bangladeshi media as much as a celebrity death. There are also other examples in the published literature using the exact same method of reporting as us that mentions the name of the victim. Below are a few examples based on our quick search. Two of these were published in ***Elsevier*** journals, including one in the ***Asian Journal of Psychiatry.***

* *Thakur V, Jain A. COVID 2019-suicides: A global psychological pandemic. Brain Behav Immun. 2020 Aug;88:952-953. doi: 10.1016/j.bbi.2020.04.062.*
* *Kar SK, Arafat SMY, Ransing R, et al. Repeated celebrity suicide in India during COVID-19 crisis: An urgent call for attention. Asian J Psychiatr. 2020;53:102382. doi:10.1016/j.ajp.2020.102382*
* *Hossain, M., Purohit, N., Sharma, R., Bhattacharya, S., McKyer, E. L. J., & Ma, P. (2020). Suicide of a farmer amid COVID-19 in India: Perspectives on social determinants of suicidal behavior and prevention strategies. https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/ekam3*

1. [Our letter] also describes the methods used, and uses the phrase 'commited suicide', which goes against accepted media guidelines.

As mentioned in the previous response, Bishop is incorrect. The media guidelines are for suicide reporting in the media, not in academic journals. If the methods used in suicide were not reported in scientific papers, hardly any suicide papers would be published as the majority mention the method of suicide. A very detailed response to this comment can be found in our response letter: <https://doi.org/10.1111/ppc.12991>. The term “committing suicide” is widely used in print media as well as in research publications. Again, if the journal’s policy was a preference to not use the word ‘commit’, the peer reviewer(s) should have told us and again we would have gladly changed it to ‘die by suicide’.

1. It is not clear what scientific value there is in such a report, which has potential to cause harm.

The debate over whether a paper contributes scientific value or not, is ultimately subjective. However, we believe that our letter made a contribution to the literature. Our letter has become one of the most highly cited articles in the ***Asian Journal of Psychiatry****.* Our letter has already got over 730 citations on *Google Scholar* which suggests that our letter has scientific merit. Even the editor-in-chief of the journal, **Prof Rajiv Tandon**, also selected our letter in two of his editorials, as mentioned:

*“Nine of the most highly cited articles on COVID-19 and mental health were published in our Journal (**[Ahmed et al., 2020](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1876201821000010" \l "bib0005);**[Banerjee, 2020](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1876201821000010" \l "bib0010);**[Goyal et al., 2020](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1876201821000010" \l "bib0015);****[Mamun and Griffiths, 2020](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1876201821000010" \l "bib0020);****[Rajkumar, 2020](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1876201821000010" \l "bib0025);**[Roy et al., 2020](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1876201821000010" \l "bib0030);**[Tandon, 2020a](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1876201821000010" \l "bib0035),**[b](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1876201821000010" \l "bib0040),**[Zandifar and Badrfam, 2020](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1876201821000010" \l "bib0050)); each of these has been cited over 100 times in the scientific literature.*”

* *Tandon R. (2021a). COVID-19 and the Asian Journal of Psychiatry: Keeping 2020 in the rear-view mirror. Asian Journal of Psychiatry, 56, 102569.* [*https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ajp.2021.102569*](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ajp.2021.102569).
* *Tandon R. (2021b). The bitter lessons of COVID-19: Acknowledging and working through many points of tension. Asian Journal of Psychiatry, 55, 102545. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ajp.2021.102545>*

**Comment:** #3 ***Actinopolyspora biskrensis*** commented November 2022

This article is entitled, *“First COVID-19 suicide case in Bangladesh due to fear of COVID-19 and xenophobia: Possible suicide prevention strategies”.* As noted by Dr. Bishop (#2), the details of this suicide case are derived from a single short article in a local publication. Here is how the news article and details are related in paragraphs 3 and 4 of the paper:

**Response:** Dr. Bishop’s comments have already been responded to above. The details of the suicide case were not based on a single newspaper source. Being the first suicide case during the initiation of the COVID-19 pandemic in Bangladesh, this suicide got wide media attention and became the talk of Bangladesh. There are dozens of newspaper reports and television reports on the suicide case, as well as many discussions or posts on social media. In addition to the the media reports, the first author also contacted a local journalist, and cross-checked information, because Bangladeshi online news reports are sometimes too short to get a full insight.

**Comment:** The fourth paragraph is presented without any citations. I illustrate concerns with each sentence in this paragraph below: Paragraph 4 Sentence 1. How do the authors know *“(t)he main factor that drove the man to suicide was prejudice by the others in the village who thought he had COVID-19 even though there was no diagnosis?”* The [news article](https://www.somoynews.tv/pages/details/204558" \t "_blank) (read using *Google Translate*) discussing this case quoted a health official who said, in part:*“...it is thought that he may have committed suicide due to corona fear****or family reasons.****”[emphasis added]*. As the short news article seems to be the sole source of information used by the authors for this case, it seems the authors have grossly exaggerated the *speculation* of a health official into a decisive “main factor” explaining the reasons for the suicide.

**Response:** As already mentioned, the article cited was not the only source. We only cited one source as letters published in the journal have limits on the number of references (i.e., 10 references maximum). There were dozens of news reports about the case, but we only gave an indicative example of the reported case.

In Bangladesh, after a suicide, the dead body is taken by the forensic team of the police department to carry out an autopsy. Any suicide case investigation is done by a team that consists of police as well as a few healthcare professionals who are experts in forensic medicine and suicide. Then, a post-mortem report is prepared where information related to the type of suicide, methods used, suicide reason(s), etc. For those suicide cases with public attention (like the present suicide case), the team makes a statement.

However, for any suicide case, there are no reliable methods to assess why the suicide definitively occurred (because you cannot ask someone who died by suicide why they took their own life). Autopsies are the best available method for suicide case studies, although information from an autopsy might not be correct as there is no way of cross-checking with the victim. That’s why the healthcare professional might use the word, “*it is thought*” in the present case. After checking over a dozen news reports and the first author’s conversations with a local journalist, we preferred to rely on what the health official reported. This was a Letter to the Editor, not an academic paper. We used a method that is widely used in the field and reported no differently to other papers (including previous articles published in the ***Asian Journal of Psychiatry***).

**Comment:** Paragraph 4 Sentence 2. The authors state *“Arguably, the villagers were xenophobic towards Mr. Islam.”* However, the news article makes only one reference to what the local people thought: *“Seeing his fever and cold, the locals suspected him to be infected with coronavirus.”* The articles make no other mention of villagers’ beliefs, and includes nothing that could be construed as xenophobic *behavior.*

Paragraph 4 Sentence 3. The authors provide one definition of xenophobia (without citation) and then provide a different definition of xenophobia (without citation). Again, there’s no mention of any xenophobic behavior or beliefs in the news article, so this sentence seems extraneous.

**Response:** The journal only allows ten references to be cited and therefore we made decisions to what we believed were the best things to cite. Consequently, we were unable to cite as many references as we would have liked for either xenophobia or other news reports. Again, due to journal instructions about word count (600-800 words), we were not able to provide detailed links concerning xenophobia definitions as we were already in excess of the word limit.

Other news sources reported the fact that the villagers insisted that the victim should test for COVID-19 and the victim’s family also [reported this](https://www.natun-barta.com/53541/141/%E0%A6%97%E0%A6%BE%E0%A6%87%E0%A6%AC%E0%A6%BE%E0%A6%A8%E0%A7%8D%E0%A6%A7%E0%A6%BE%E0%A7%9F-%E0%A6%95%E0%A6%B0%E0%A7%8B%E0%A6%A8%E0%A6%BE-%E0%A6%B8%E0%A6%A8%E0%A7%8D%E0%A6%A6%E0%A7%87%E0%A6%B9%E0%A7%87-%E0%A6%97%E0%A7%83%E0%A6%B9%E0%A6%95%E0%A6%B0%E0%A7%8D%E0%A6%A4%E0%A6%BE%E0%A6%B0-%E0%A6%86%E0%A6%A4%E0%A7%8D%E0%A6%AE%E0%A6%B9%E0%A6%A4%E0%A7%8D%E0%A6%AF%E0%A6%BE!-------) (and [also here](https://newsvision71.blogspot.com/2020/03/blog-post_26.html?)). Even the most popular news channel in the country, [DBC News](https://dbcnews.tv/articles/%E0%A6%95%E0%A6%B0%E0%A7%8B%E0%A6%A8%E0%A6%BE%E0%A7%9F-%E0%A6%86%E0%A6%95%E0%A7%8D%E0%A6%B0%E0%A6%BE%E0%A6%A8%E0%A7%8D%E0%A6%A4-%E0%A6%85%E0%A6%AA%E0%A6%AC%E0%A6%BE%E0%A6%A6-%E0%A6%B8%E0%A6%87%E0%A6%A4%E0%A7%87-%E0%A6%A8%E0%A6%BE-%E0%A6%AA%E0%A7%87%E0%A6%B0%E0%A7%87-%E0%A6%8F%E0%A6%95-%E0%A6%AF%E0%A7%81%E0%A6%AC%E0%A6%95%E0%A7%87%E0%A6%B0-%E0%A6%86%E0%A6%A4%E0%A7%8D%E0%A6%AE%E0%A6%B9%E0%A6%A4%E0%A7%8D%E0%A6%AF%E0%A6%BE) reported the suicide case by focusing the “xenophobia” in the **title of their report** as well as in the **reports**. The claims concerning xenophobia came from a number of different media sources and here are a few:

* *<https://dbcnews.tv/articles/%E0%A6%95%E0%A6%B0%E0%A7%8B%E0%A6%A8%E0%A6%BE%E0%A7%9F-%E0%A6%86%E0%A6%95%E0%A7%8D%E0%A6%B0%E0%A6%BE%E0%A6%A8%E0%A7%8D%E0%A6%A4-%E0%A6%85%E0%A6%AA%E0%A6%AC%E0%A6%BE%E0%A6%A6-%E0%A6%B8%E0%A6%87%E0%A6%A4%E0%A7%87-%E0%A6%A8%E0%A6%BE-%E0%A6%AA%E0%A7%87%E0%A6%B0%E0%A7%87-%E0%A6%8F%E0%A6%95-%E0%A6%AF%E0%A7%81%E0%A6%AC%E0%A6%95%E0%A7%87%E0%A6%B0-%E0%A6%86%E0%A6%A4%E0%A7%8D%E0%A6%AE%E0%A6%B9%E0%A6%A4%E0%A7%8D%E0%A6%AF%E0%A6%BE>*
* [*https://www.odhikar.news/country-news/132420*](https://www.odhikar.news/country-news/132420)
* [*https://newsvision71.blogspot.com/2020/03/blog-post\_26.html*](https://newsvision71.blogspot.com/2020/03/blog-post_26.html)*?*
* [*https://www.natun-barta.com/53541/141/%E0%A6%97%E0%A6%BE%E0%A6%87%E0%A6%AC%E0%A6%BE%E0%A6%A8%E0%A7%8D%E0%A6%A7%E0%A6%BE%E0%A7%9F-%E0%A6%95%E0%A6%B0%E0%A7%8B%E0%A6%A8%E0%A6%BE-%E0%A6%B8%E0%A6%A8%E0%A7%8D%E0%A6%A6%E0%A7%87%E0%A6%B9%E0%A7%87-%E0%A6%97%E0%A7%83%E0%A6%B9%E0%A6%95%E0%A6%B0%E0%A7%8D%E0%A6%A4%E0%A6%BE%E0%A6%B0-%E0%A6%86%E0%A6%A4%E0%A7%8D%E0%A6%AE%E0%A6%B9%E0%A6%A4%E0%A7%8D%E0%A6%AF%E0%A6%BE!-------*](https://www.natun-barta.com/53541/141/%E0%A6%97%E0%A6%BE%E0%A6%87%E0%A6%AC%E0%A6%BE%E0%A6%A8%E0%A7%8D%E0%A6%A7%E0%A6%BE%E0%A7%9F-%E0%A6%95%E0%A6%B0%E0%A7%8B%E0%A6%A8%E0%A6%BE-%E0%A6%B8%E0%A6%A8%E0%A7%8D%E0%A6%A6%E0%A7%87%E0%A6%B9%E0%A7%87-%E0%A6%97%E0%A7%83%E0%A6%B9%E0%A6%95%E0%A6%B0%E0%A7%8D%E0%A6%A4%E0%A6%BE%E0%A6%B0-%E0%A6%86%E0%A6%A4%E0%A7%8D%E0%A6%AE%E0%A6%B9%E0%A6%A4%E0%A7%8D%E0%A6%AF%E0%A6%BE!-------)

**Comment:** Paragraph 4 Sentence 4 starts, *“Given that the victim believed he had COVID-19….”* The news article does not say that the victim believed he had COVID-19, it only says that he had *“fever and cold”* and that he was upset that *“his body was drier than before.”* The authors do not seem to have any evidence about what the victim believed.

**Response:** We were surprised to see that this comment given it was based on the use of *Google Translate*. *Google Translate* is not reliable in this instance. *Google Translate* is unable to deal with Bengali idioms and phrases. It needs someone who speaks Bangla to see what the cited news report actually means. The first author is a native Bangla speaker who wrote the quotes based on the news report. As aforementioned, the suicide case was not written based on a single news report. We mentioned only one news report due to reference limitations as instructed by the journal. However, here is another one of the news reports. The family reported that the victim believed he had COVID-19 and was also worried about his family as the infection could be transmitted from him.

* <https://newsvision71.blogspot.com/2020/03/blog-post_26.html>?

**Comment:** The sentence continues *“it is also thought that he committed suicide out of a moral duty to ensure he did not pass on the virus to anyone in his village”* details which (again) are not mentioned in the news article and which seem (again) to be pure speculation by the authors.

**Response:** The last line in the cited news report clearly indicated that there was a “family issue” related to the death. In the other sources, the family issue was mentioned as “*the victim believed he had COVID-19 and was also worried about his family as the infection could be transmitted from him (as reported by his family)”*. In addition, based on the first author’s communication with the journalist, he confirmed that the victims were worried about his family and he did not want others to get infected because of him. Therefore, there is no doubt of moral duty as it was reported in our letter!

* <https://newsvision71.blogspot.com/2020/03/blog-post_26.html>?
* [*https://dbcnews.tv/articles/%E0%A6%95%E0%A6%B0%E0%A7%8B%E0%A6%A8%E0%A6%BE%E0%A7%9F-%E0%A6%86%E0%A6%95%E0%A7%8D%E0%A6%B0%E0%A6%BE%E0%A6%A8%E0%A7%8D%E0%A6%A4-%E0%A6%85%E0%A6%AA%E0%A6%AC%E0%A6%BE%E0%A6%A6-%E0%A6%B8%E0%A6%87%E0%A6%A4%E0%A7%87-%E0%A6%A8%E0%A6%BE-%E0%A6%AA%E0%A7%87%E0%A6%B0%E0%A7%87-%E0%A6%8F%E0%A6%95-%E0%A6%AF%E0%A7%81%E0%A6%AC%E0%A6%95%E0%A7%87%E0%A6%B0-%E0%A6%86%E0%A6%A4%E0%A7%8D%E0%A6%AE%E0%A6%B9%E0%A6%A4%E0%A7%8D%E0%A6%AF%E0%A6%BE*](https://dbcnews.tv/articles/%E0%A6%95%E0%A6%B0%E0%A7%8B%E0%A6%A8%E0%A6%BE%E0%A7%9F-%E0%A6%86%E0%A6%95%E0%A7%8D%E0%A6%B0%E0%A6%BE%E0%A6%A8%E0%A7%8D%E0%A6%A4-%E0%A6%85%E0%A6%AA%E0%A6%AC%E0%A6%BE%E0%A6%A6-%E0%A6%B8%E0%A6%87%E0%A6%A4%E0%A7%87-%E0%A6%A8%E0%A6%BE-%E0%A6%AA%E0%A7%87%E0%A6%B0%E0%A7%87-%E0%A6%8F%E0%A6%95-%E0%A6%AF%E0%A7%81%E0%A6%AC%E0%A6%95%E0%A7%87%E0%A6%B0-%E0%A6%86%E0%A6%A4%E0%A7%8D%E0%A6%AE%E0%A6%B9%E0%A6%A4%E0%A7%8D%E0%A6%AF%E0%A6%BE)

**Comment:** As these two paragraphs are the only two that discuss the Bangladesh suicide, I cannot fathom how the authors choose to claim in their title that this is the, *“First COVID-19 suicide case in Bangladesh due to fear of COVID-19.”* They present no evidence of this at all.

**Response:** The first author is from Bangladesh and experienced what was happening with regard to the reporting of the case in the media and social media. The media reported that fear of the virus and fear of spreading it to his family appeared to be important factors underlying the suicide. The first author had never heard of a suicide case related to COVID-19 before this, and a cross-searching of suicide news reports confirmed it. The COVID-19 pandemic was officially announced as a national emergency by the Bangladeshi Government on 23 March 2020, and before that time there were no concerns or public fear about this. The suicide case occurred within the day that the national lockdown was imposed in Bangladesh on 23/24 March 2020.

**Comment:** If the authors have additional sources to support their statements in this paper, it would be appreciated if they could publish a correction to include citations to those sources. Otherwise, I cannot see how the authors can support the conclusions of this paper.

**Response:** We provided the sources that we felt necessary based on the number of references allowed. We have now added a number of links to other stories on *PubPeer.*